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Coal River on a Sunday

Russell McDougall

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Coal River on a Sunday

Abstract

In 1797, when Lieutenant John Shortland sailed into the unknown waters of what is now Newcastle Harbour, he discovered 'a very fine coal river' - and, although the official name of the settlement that grew up in the 'valley about a quarter of a mile from the harbour entrance' was Newcastle, it became known as Coal River (also for a time King's Town). The reasons for settlement were coal and convicts. In the early 1800s Newcastle rivalled notorious Norfolk Island as a place of 'secondary' punishment, that is as a prison location for the worst convicts from Sydney, who, having given too much trouble there, were sent north to work in the mines- from dawn to dusk, with one break for a meagre meal.

Russell McDougall

COAL RIVER ON A SUNDAY

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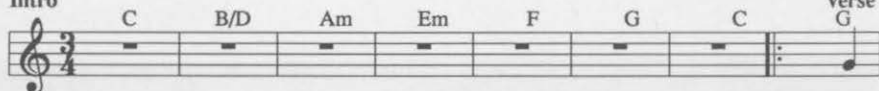
Nobbys (on the cover of this issue) was not then joined to the mainland. As Coal Island, it was a place of confinement for 'tertiary' offenders. The breakwater wall that now bridges the gap was a later product of convict labour.

The present composition was the 1987 winner of the Traditional Bush Ballad Award in the Song-Writing Competition of the Henry Lawson Festival held at Grenfell, New South Wales. The musical text has been specially prepared for this 'Newcastle' issue of *Kunapipi*; the composer is indebted to Lindsay Rowlands and Mark Brown (Department of Music, University of New England) for their assistance.

Coal River on a Sunday

Words and Music by
RUSSELL McDOUGALL

Intro



Verse

G

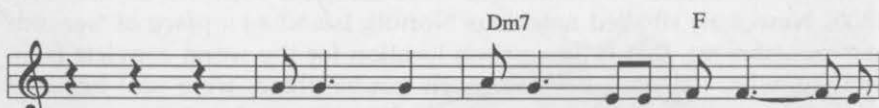
1.Coal

2.The

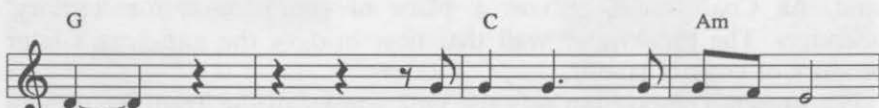


Fine

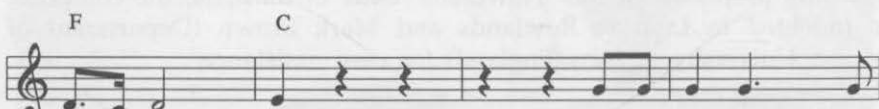
Ri-ver on a Sun-day co-min' up from the mine
criss - cross grid on me lag's cal-lous-ed back



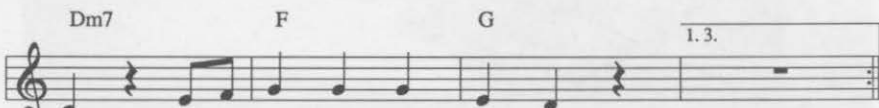
Wit-ness the sun-light that the flogg-ins de-
slips and falls down in the bul-lock-cart



fine, "Step out-side! Be hyp-no-tised -
track; In the flame trees crows wait to



watch a man break, As his back-bone da-
pick at the mud Where the coal dust

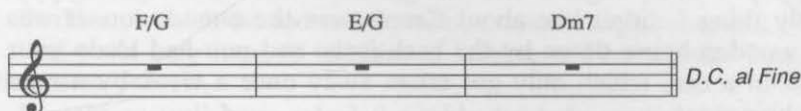
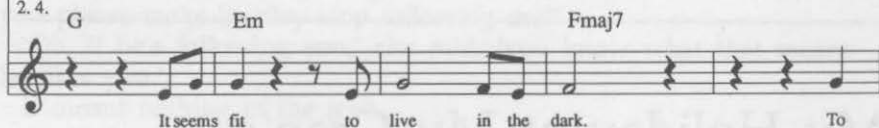


nces like a red bel-ly black snake!"
runs a way in the blood.

1. 3.

Chorus

2. 4.



3. Me father's a miner in a north country town -
His eyes are with me in the deep underground;
Me mother was Irish; she lived for religion -
God granted me the wings of a homing pigeon!

Instrumental Interlude:

Em | Em | Fmaj7 | Fmaj7 |

G | F/G | E/G | E/G | G7 | 3 times

4. The triangle undermines faith in the cross,
when there's nothing to marvel at but your own loss,
when the claws of the cat have scraped flesh from the bone
and into the cuts the salt has been sown.

Just let me back into the dark.

I'll slave and I'll carry the spark;

I don't care.

Coal River, on a Sunday, comin up from the mine.